

## Guicciardini's Sejanus: An Intertextual Death Portrait of Alessandro VI

Although Tacitus' popularity significantly declined during the medieval period, his popularity during the Renaissance significantly rebounded. Out of all the writers during this time, Tacitus' influence is clearest in the writings of Renaissance historian Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540). His familiarity with Tacitus is well observed in the *Ricordi* (last revised in 1530) (Gajda, 255-6) and the *Storia d'Italia* (begun in 1535, most of the work being done from 1537-40) (Phillips, 114-5). As Alexandra Gajda shows, Tacitus is "the only author cited by name in the late version of the *Ricordi*" and Guicciardini himself even states "Cornelius Tacitus teaches well to those who live under tyrants, the way of living and governing prudently; just so does he teach tyrants the way of establishing tyranny." (Gajda, 256; 256n11).\* A number of scholars clearly acknowledge that Guicciardini mimics Tacitean style and diction by imitating the structural, verbal, grammatical and psychological aspects of Tacitean writing (Barucci, Gajda, Phillips, Momigliano, Mellor, Phillips).

In this paper, I argue that there is a clear intertextual link between the characterization and death of Pope Alessandro VI in Guicciardini's *Storia d'Italia* with two passages from Tacitus' *Annales* and a section of Juvenal's *Satire X*. In order to do this, I rely on Guglielmo Barucci's *I segni e la storia: modelli tacitiani nella Storia d'Italia del Guicciardini* as a foil for discussing how Guicciardini's character descriptions and *exitus* literature is derived from Tacitus and the impression that it conveys to the reader. To do this, I compare and analyze *Storia d'Italia* 6.4 and 1.2, *Annales* IV. 1.3 and IV. 10.2, and *Satire X*. In my comparison of these sections, I analyze and compare the character descriptions of Sejanus and Alessandro, the strikingly similar poisoning scenes of Alessandro and Drusus the Younger, and the description of Alessandro's funeral and Juvenal's description of Sejanus' funeral.

\*Note: Gajda includes the Italian text from the *Ricordi*, but I have translated it for simplicity.

In my analysis of these five passages, I argue that there are an undeniable number of verbal, structural and contextual parallels, such as the use of etymologically related words in similar contexts, the use of distancing language, the framing of narrative using rumors, and the similarities in sentence structure within Guicciardini's account. Although it would be unreasonable to expect two historical stories to be identical, I argue that Guicciardini is clearly shaping the story to signal changes to come in the narrative.

I will prove that the intertext between these three authors casts a shockingly grim shadow on the following sections of the *Storia d'Italia*. After this point, the reader begins to see the rise of Cesare Borgia and his influence in Italy. The linking of these two groups of characters gives the reader a clear indication that circumstances will deteriorate very quickly from that point in the narrative. Just as Sejanus's poisoning of Drusus shows the worsening effects of the minister's *ambitio*, the accidental poisoning of Alessandro and Cesare (and Cesare's subsequent survival) prepares the reader for an increase in Cesare's excessive ambition. By doing so, Guicciardini is effectively able to link two characters in his history directly to the cause of Italy's woes during the time: princely ambition.

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